

THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JOINT CONFERENCE OF THE SACRED COMMUNITY OF THE HOLY MOUNT ATHOS CONCERNING THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE ORTHODOX AND ROMAN CATHOLICS

The Extraordinary Joint Conference of the Sacred Community on Mount Athos, 9/22 April, 1980, noting that the issue of the relations of our holy Orthodox Church with the heterodox has assumed a serious and resolute character, especially as it relates to the dialogue with Roman Catholics, has resolved publically to state the opinion of the Athonite fathers on this subject for general consideration:

1.) We believe that our holy Orthodox Church is the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ, which possesses the fulness of grace and truth and, in consequence thereof, unbroken apostolic succession.

On the contrary, the "churches" and "confessions" of the West, having in many ways perverted the Faith of the Gospel, the apostles and the fathers, are deprived of sanctifying grace, of real mysteries and apostolic succession. That this is correct, His Eminence, Metropolitan Maximos of Stavropolis stresses: "Orthodoxy is not one of the churches, but The Church Herself. She has preserved precisely and authentically the teaching of Christ in its pristine splendor and in all its purity. Over and above a simple, unbroken historical continuity and consistency there exists in Her a spiritual and ontological authenticity. The same Faith, the same Spirit, the same life. It is this which constitutes the distinguishing feature of Orthodoxy and which justifies Her claim that She is and remains The Church" (Episkepsis, #227—March 15, 1980).

2.) Dialogue with the heterodox is not reprehensible from the Orthodox point of view if its goal is to inform them of the Orthodox Faith and, thus, make it possible for them thereby to return to Orthodoxy when they receive divine enlightenment and their eyes are opened.

3.) Theological dialogue must not in any way be linked with prayer in common, or by joint participation in any liturgical or worship services whatsoever; or in other activities which might create the impression that our Orthodox Church accepts, on the one hand, Roman Catholics as part of the fulness of the Church, or, on the other hand, the Pope as the canonical bishop of Rome. Activities such as these mislead both the fulness of the Orthodox people and the Roman Catholics themselves, fostering among them a mistaken notion as to what Orthodoxy thinks of their teaching.

The Holy Mountain is grievously disturbed by the tendency of certain Orthodox hierarchs who have been invited to participate in Roman Catholic services, celebrations and processions, especially on the occasion of the return of holy relics. Conversely, we congratulate those hierarchs who have publically expressed their alarm for the fullness of Orthodoxy.

4.) We express our complete approval of what His Holiness, the Ecumenical Patriarch said during the visit of the Pope to Constantinople, namely that there exist various impediments between Orthodox and Roman Catholics: "First of all, we have serious theological problems which concern fundamental principles of the Christian Faith" (Episkepsis, #221—Dec. 1, 1979, p.17). These divergences in the principles of the Christian Faith require that we do not advance to participation in common liturgies and worship services before oneness of Faith is attained. The mystical character of the kiss of peace during the divine Eucharist always presupposes harmony of Faith: "Let us love one another that with one

mind we may confess..." We cannot pray together, especially during the divine liturgy, when we do not believe in the same Faith and are separated by fundamental questions of Faith. Only an indifference to the Faith could permit us to do so.

Moreover, the Holy Mountain cannot accept the opinion, expressed in the joint statement of the Patriarch and the Pope, concerning the "cleansing of the historical memory of our Churches" and the partial opening, by means of a dialogue of love, of the road towards "new movements in theological work and a new attitude to the past which is common to both Churches" (Episkepsis, *ibid.*, p.19). Actually, the heretics must cleanse their own historical memory of all their own historically acknowledged deviations in Faith and practice from the true, evangelical Orthodox Faith. On the contrary, the historical memory of the Orthodox, which is based on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and on the constant experience of the Apostolic Faith of the God-bearing Fathers, must be lived by all of us in repentance and humility, and must instruct us both in the present and in the future life if we do not wish to fall from that Faith. As Orthodox we must cleanse ourselves by means of the historical memory of the Church, but not "cleanse" Her with an egotistical and anthropocentric spirit, setting ourselves up as judges of the Tradition of the Church.

5.) The Holy Mountain is convinced, not without great anxiety, that although the Orthodox are making many concessions and compromises to the Roman Catholics, the latter antithetically continue to adhere to their own errors which have served as the cause of their schism from the Orthodox Church and later led to the Protestant split. Thus, the Pope, during his visit to the center of Orthodoxy in the patriarchal cathedral, did not in the least hesitate to proclaim that he was coming to Constantinople as the successor of Peter, "who as the ultimate authority has the responsibility of superintending the unity of all, to guarantee the agreement of the Church of God in fidelity and in the 'faith which was once delivered unto the saints' (Jude 3)" (Episkepsis, *ibid.*, p.9). In other words, the Pope defended (papal) infallibility and primacy; and there are many other actions and manifestations which the Pope has effected on behalf of uniatism. We remember the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Greek government and the Vatican which, even though it may justify papism, is unjust and strikes out at the Mother and Nourisher of our nation, the Orthodox Church.

6.) The Holy Mountain also expresses its anxiety over the constituency of the commission for the dialogue. Uniates comprise a portion of the Roman Catholic delegation, a fact which is a provocation for the Orthodox. The sensibilities and dignity of the Orthodox delegation demand the immediate substitution of others in place of the uniates in the membership.

No Orthodox whose manner of thinking corresponds to his Faith can agree to participate in a commission which includes uniates.

Likewise, the Holy Mountain is disturbed by the great weakness and insufficiency of the Orthodox delegation. The most remarkable Orthodox theologians are not participating. The Holy Mountain is also not represented, despite the fact that it is the sole monastic center which preserves the Faith and the theology of the Fathers, and which is far removed from the influence of secularism and scholastic Western theology.

7.) From the Orthodox point of view there is no justification for optimism in regard to the dialogue, and for this reason no haste

should be exhibited concerning it. The Roman Catholics are pressing the dialogue, hoping to strengthen themselves by annexing Orthodoxy to themselves, for they are confronted by very powerful internal disturbances and crises, as is well known. The number of former Roman Catholics who have converted to Orthodoxy also disturbs them. But Orthodoxy has no reason to hasten towards dialogue since the papists remain so obdurate and immovable as regards infallibility, uniatism, and the rest of their pernicious teachings.

Hastening the dialogue under such conditions is equivalent to spiritual suicide for the Orthodox. Many facts give the impression that the Roman Catholics are preparing a union on the pattern of a unia. Can it be that the Orthodox who are hastening to the dialogue are conscious of this?

The Holy Mountain maintains that for it there can be no question of accepting a fait accompli, that, by the grace of God, it will remain faithful, as the Lord's Orthodox people, to the Faith of the holy apostles and the holy Fathers, impelled to this also by love for the heterodox, to whom real help is given only when the Orthodox show them the vastness of their spiritual sickness and the means of its cure by maintaining a consistently Orthodox position.

The unsuccessful attempts in the past with regard to union must teach us that steadfast unity in the Truth of the Church, in accordance with the will of God, presupposes a different preparation and a path distinct from that taken in the past and from that which, apparently, is now being taken.

All of the representatives and superiors of the twenty sacred and pious monasteries of the Holy Mountain of Athos at the Extraordinary Joint Conference.